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After questioning the credential value of the high school diploma at the present time and pointing out the need for considering the multiple psychological and social handicaps of the minority-group school dropout, this conference paper discusses (1) the rentention power of the schools, (2) youth employment, (3) equal job opportunities for Negroes, and (4) the environmental and psychoeducational correlates of school withdrawal. It also describes various school and extraschool dropout programs and strategies, and sets forth curriculum guidelines for teaching disadvantaged students to encourage them to remain in school. (EF)

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THE SCHOOL DROPOUT TODAY

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In the social and behavioral sciences a correlate often masquerades as a consequence. Human conditions that tend to go together are frequently placed in a cause-and-effect relationship that is rationalized with more wishful thinking than logic or evidence. Such is the case in popular discussions of early school withdrawal. Usually, the gambit is to show that high school dropouts are not as employable and law abiding as their graduating peers, and then to slip into the convenient conclusion that the dropout is at a disadvantage because he has no diploma. This leads to some clear and simple caveats for high school students. To those who are able and stable enough to earn a diploma, the message is, "Stay in school or your future will be ruined". To the marginal students who are inclined to withdraw early, the message is, "Stay in school and your future will probably be saved". The first piece of advice is gratuitous since it is beamed at a group that will probably finish school anyway. The second is little better than a placebo since its audience is handicapped in so many other ways that it needs far more than a diploma to face the future successfully.

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A high school diploma can be valuable in two ways. It can symbolize achievement in academic or vocational studies and it can have credential value in a society that places a high premium on school attendance regardless of how much is accomplished there. For many young people, it has served as a ticket to employment even when the job has not demanded the kind and level of skills acquired in high school. But the certificate loses its glitter as a prize to be coveted and honored when schools dilute their learning demands in order to improve their retention rates. Today, the diploma is not necessarily a mark of distinction as it once was. In the early 1920's, when nearly 80 per cent of the fifth grade pupils never finished secondary school, the median I.Q. of public high school seniors in general was equivalent to the median I.Q. of today's seniors in honors classes only (Hollingworth, 1926). It stands to reason, therefore, that a high school education was stiffer and more prestigeful at that time than it is today, when closer to two-thirds of all fifth graders eventually complete high school.

The credential value of the diploma is also diminishing as more and more adolescents are persuaded to stay on until graduation. Not much stock can be placed in a "union card" if it is within reach of the vast majority of young people. Its mere accessibility makes it the kind of possession (not unlike the elementary school diploma) that one can't do much with and can't do much without. It will not open doors to privilege for anyone who has it; but on the other hand, these doors will not open unless one has it. Diploma devaluation already exists in the job world as evidenced by the fact that the educational attainment of the unemployed is increasing more rapidly than that of the employed (U. S. Department of

Labor, 1965b). The net effect of reducing dropout rates is to add more graduates to the army of unemployed rather than to guarantee jobs for those young people who have to be persuaded to graduate.

For the dwindling few who are unable or unwilling to earn the diploma, dropping out becomes a more terrible stigma than it ever has been, partly because they are seen as having failed at an easy task and partly because their failure classifies them as extreme non-conformists. But obviously, incomplete schooling is not their only handicap. The kind of person who drops out of school today, when the diploma is a minimum essential, is quite different from the kind who dropped out of school some fifty years ago, when the diploma was a valuable credential. He is likely to be beset by many other deterrents to life-success that would probably linger on even if he finished school. The chances are that he comes from a poor, low-prestige family, or a disenfranchised minority group. More often than not he is failing at school or suffering any number of physical and emotional handicaps. To dub him a "school dropout" and suggest by that label the cause and cure of his subsequent problems requires a good deal more evidence than we now have.

Since the law obligates children to remain in school usually until the age of sixteen, only two years of attendance separate most dropouts from high school graduates who do not go on to college. Keeping today's dropout-prone in school for the two years so that they could graduate with their classmates is not going to help much in doing away with the factors that caused them to consider leaving school in the first place. Whatever derailed them from their journey through the grades will probably prevent

them also from becoming attractive choices as employees, marriage partners, community workers, or members of the armed forces. Surprisingly, reports of research on school dropouts fail to include the social and emotional concomitants of early school withdrawal as independent variables. In most studies, the importance of a diploma for occupational success is "proven" by comparisons between the job histories of dropouts and of unselected graduates without regard for the fact that the two groups differ in many other ways that are perhaps even more critical to employability.

A close look at research on education and employment shows that a high school diploma can be relatively useless to some people. It has been noted, for example, that in 1964 about 25 per cent of the unemployed Negro males 18 years old and over had high school diplomas, as against 32 per cent of the employed--a difference of only 7 per cent. Comparable figures among white males, on the other hand, were 38 per cent and 57 per cent respectively--a difference of as much as 19 per cent (U.S. Department of Labor, 1965b). This finding suggests that, assuming the diploma alone accounts for these discrepancies, it is a more precious credential in the hands of a white adolescent than in the hands of a Negro. It also lends some credence to the hypothesis that at the lower skill levels color of skin is more important to success in landing a job than is a high school education.

With so many other factors complicating the life of the school dropout, why is so much attention given to his finishing school? Why, indeed, is he called a "school dropout" rather than a Negro who has left school, or a slum dweller who has left school, or a scholastic failure who has left school, or an emotionally disturbed adolescent who has left school?

The answer can only be a matter of conjecture. Part of it may lie in the fact that it is easier to manipulate a person's educational history than to change his social status, his academic aptitude, his mental health, or the color of his skin. It is like the well-known folk tale about the person searching for his wife's lost diamond brooch under a lamp post, and when asked whether that is where it had been lost, he answered, "No, but the light is better here."

Emphasis on the value of a high school diploma may also reflect widespread faith and vested interest in universal, free, compulsory education. The school rivals the church in the public's image of an institution that can have a powerful social impact among the masses. Many are convinced that it can cure social ills and personal defects if a proper dosage of of schooling is administered with enough skill and patience. In our society, education is above criticism, despite the fact that educators are fair game for attack. Its alleged bounty so dazzles public imagination that hardly anybody ever bothers to find out what it cannot do even under the best of circumstances. Who would dare argue that achieving 100 per cent school retention is not a desirable goal? Certainly not industry and the labor unions, since they want to keep unskilled young people in school--and out of the glutted job market--for as long as possible. Certainly not the school administrator whose school subsidies are computed on a per capita attendance formula. Therefore, by emphasizing the importance of finishing school, the public champions a non-controversial cause that is in the best interests of everybody concerned, and thus relieves itself of the responsibility for cataloging the dropout's multiple handicaps and planning complex, expensive programs of social rehabilitation. This is not to suggest that education

is something of an opiate and should be exposed as such. It is, in fact, as indispensible to personal fulfillment as basic nutrition is to physical subsistence. However, it cannot guarantee good fortune any more than basic nutrition can guarantee good health.

The prime targets for "Stay in School" campaigns are the impoverished, lower-class groups, with their disproportionately high non-white membership, who are vastly over-represented in the nation's dropout population. Such pleas often create the impression that a high school diploma can go a long way toward reversing the deprivation effects of their <u>total</u> environment and upbringing. This is purely euphoric. Perfecting school retention rates in depressed areas won't do much by way of combating poverty and alienation. However, there isn't a comprehensive plan that stands a chance of success without a strong educational component. No matter how ingenious and costly are the social engineering strategies for bringing privilege to the slum youth who drops out of school, he will become increasingly conspicuous as one of the near-vanishing few in his age group who could not or would not graduate. He needs the credential to show for his years of schooling, even if his achievement is minimal, because the spirit of the times demands it. What is more, he needs to show satisfactory scholastic achievement because the criterion for minimum essentials in education is rising. We are fast approaching the time when a child from an underprivileged environment will be doomed to a life of economic dependency and status depression unless he can master even more academic skills than are necessary to earn the high school diploma.

The Schools' Retention Power

How serious is the dropout problem in American schools? Not serious at all, by international standards. It is said that proportionately, more Negroes in the South finish college than do Englishmen in Great Britain. The difference probably lies in the cultural traditions of the New and Old Worlds. Schools in this country tend to be absorbing institutions following the principle that there ought to be a place and program for all children, while European schools are more inclined to be filtering institutions with programs restricted to those capable of measuring up to pre-set standards. This may be one reason why the rate of college attendance among 18 year-olds in this country is at least twice that of any other country in the world.

The degree to which early school withdrawal is a problem is not easy to assess with precision. One method is to estimate the numbers dropping out each year, and these range anywhere from 650,000 to about one million. Another commonly used method is to trace a high school graduating class back to the fifth grade and calculate the rate of attendance shrinkage over the seven year period. This figure is declining each year, and by all odds the present graduating class has decreased by no more than a third of its size since it was in the fifth grade. Dentler (1964) has examined the steady improvement in the schools' retention power, and he notes that at this rate 70 per cent of the 1967-68 fifth graders will graduate in 1975 and 80 per cent of the 1992-93 fifth graders will finish high school by the end of the century. This reflects a change from 80 per cent dropping out in 1920 to 80 per cent graduating in the year 2000.

Impressive as these figures are, they are on the conservative side. Many students disappear from school for any number of involuntary reasons,

such as severe physical disabilities, emotional disturbance, trouble with the law, and impending marriage or parenthood. Kohler (1962) estimated that in a large city school system as many as 5 per cent of the total high school population are enrolled in special programs for the handicapped and another 5 per cent show signs of delinquent behavior or serious emotional disorders. If the involuntary withdrawals were removed from dropout inventories, the retention rates from fifth grade through high school graduation would be closer to 75 per cent in 1960 (Dentler and Warshauer, 1965) rather than the 62 per cent reported in government surveys (National Education Association, 1963b). Even these figures fail to take into account the sizable numbers of students who do not graduate with their age peers but are enrolled in school anyway. Saleem and Miller (1963) report that as many as 10 per cent of the 1959-60 high school dropouts in Syracuse returned to school within two years of their withdrawal, and another 15 per cent were engaged in other kinds of study at the same time.

A dropout is generally defined arbitrarily as a student who withdraws prior to finishing high school. With retention rates improving and the credential value of the diploma declining, it may be necessary to redefine the term on the basis of college attendance. The college diploma seems to be a more hard-won prize for students entering college than is the high school diploma for those entering high school, as evidenced by the fact that the current college dropout rate exceeds 50 per cent, which is much higher than the attrition rate for high schools. Moreover, the difference in lifetime earnings is much greater between college graduates and dropouts than between high school graduates and dropouts. There is

already talk of persuading high school graduates to continue on to college and thus improve its image as an absorbing institution rather than a filtering one. The slogan of "everybody passes" has moved from the elementary to the high school and may continue on to college with the result that for an increasing number of students earning a diploma will one day be more of a ritual and a sign of patience and conformity than that of accomplishment.

Employment, Civil Rights, and the Dropout

The social barriers facing the school dropout have not received balanced coverage in popular and professional journals. Most of what is known and reported about his post-dropout history deals with how he fares in finding a job. Much is made, for example, of the fact that employment opportunities are becoming increasingly inaccessible to the uneducated. His problems on the labor market are continuously in the public eye because of the constant monitoring of labor conditions in this country by the U. S. Department of Labor. Much less is known about his other hardships in the social world. There is some evidence to show that he is overrepresented among delinquent and criminal groups (Schreiber, 1963). However, virtually nothing is known about the manner and degree to which he exercises his citizenship rights and responsibilities at the polls, in community affairs, and in the armed forces. Nor is much known about his problems in making a happy marital choice and building a wholesome family life. The chances are that if his post-dropout experiences were thoroughly researched, he would be depicted as a multiple failure, not only in the job world but in other important social domains as well. The current literature, however, deals mainly with his history of employment, possibly because so much more is

known about this aspect of his life than about any other. It may also reflect a popular feeling that the major function of the school in society is to prepare youth for vocational success.

Some basic statistics regarding youth and the job market offer important insight into the plight of the dropout. In 1964, there were approximately 15 million persons age 16 to 21, half of whom were employed, generally occupying the lower paying, less stable jobs. Some 1.2 million were jobless and their rate of unemployment was 14 per cent--more than 3½ times that of persons age 25 and over. This age group constituted approximately 12 per cent of the total labor force in 1964, but its unemployed accounted for 31 per cent of all out-of-work persons. Joblessness declines with increased age for men in their teens and twenties, the 16 and 17 year olds showing an unemployment rate of 17 per cent as against 11 per cent for the 20 and 21 year olds during 1964. In October 1964, a special survey was made of unemployment rates among youth, and the results showed that about 7 out of 10 unemployed, age 16 to 21 were no longer attending school and that half of this group had dropped out before graduating from high school. The unemployment rate for dropouts was 1½ times as high as for those who had at least a high school education (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965e).

Unemployment is generally much higher among youthful job seekers than among older ones, especially those who are married. A young person is not prepared enough to choose from a wide range of job alternatives on the job market, even if he has earned a high school diploma. He must rely on work shortages in the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations which have limited openings. The dropout fares even worse despite the fact that in many instances he is as equipped with work skills as the high school

graduate in the jobs open to them. While unemployment rates generally decline from lower to higher age groups, the downward trend is steeper for graduates than for dropouts. In 1964, for example, the rate of unemployment among graduates was about 82 per cent that of dropouts at age 16-17, some 75 per cent at age 18-19, about 70 per cent at age 20-21, and only a bit more than 50 per cent at age 22-24. It seems, therefore, that although the dropout stands to improve his job status with the passage of time, age and experience do less for him than for his age mate who has finished school.

In October, 1959, 60 per cent of the unemployed out-of-school youth, age 16-21, were dropouts, but by October, 1964 the situation had become reversed with a majority of the jobless youths holding high school diplomas. During that period, the proportion of dropouts in the out-of-school population, age 16-24 fell from 43 per cent to 36 per cent (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965c). This means that while a smaller fraction of young people were dropping out of school, those who would have withdrawn but were persuaded to stay on until graduation probably continued to find it hard to locate a job. The diploma by itself was apparently not a ticket to job success for these students.

Teenagers and young adults are over-represented on the unemployment lists primarily because they are the least trained and least experienced job seekers. There are simply too many of them and too few opportunities for the kind of work they are capable of doing. Moreover, the discrepancy threatens to widen sharply for the next decade and beyond. By 1970, half of the nation's population will be under 26 as the bumper crop of post-war babies comes of age (Bierstock, 1964). What these vast numbers of young

people will probably face is a declining need for unskilled blue-collar workers and a sharp increase in opportunities for professionals and technicians, as well as for workers in the service industries (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965a). Technological change will force an upward swing in the minimum education requirements in those occupations for which a rise in job openings is anticipated (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965g). With the occupations that have the lowest educational prerequisites showing actual decreases in employment opportunities, the uneducated don't stand a chance, and that includes those who hold a high school diploma. What constitutes basic literacy in today's world will be inadequate for the world of the future. One of the most serious questions of our time, therefore, is whether the schools are capable of responding to the increasing educational demands made upon them. They have done a commendable job in providing education for the masses, and they are raising the general achievement levels steadily; but the rate of improvement is not rapid enough to keep pace with society's requirements in an age when knowledge is multiplying more rapidly than ever and the unskilled labor force is becoming obsolete.

Against the background of shrinking opportunity for young people with limited scholastic achievement stands the Negro's demand for social justice and economic well-being. In his battle for civil rights, he is caught in the crossfire of two conflicting realities. On the one hand he must elevate his educational horizons in order to neutralize the depressing effects of racial bigotry; otherwise, racial equality will remain but a dream no matter how much civil rights legislation is passed. On the other hand, there is the painful reality that racial bigotry neutralizes the elevating effects of his education unless he is able to advance far beyond the high school level.

It is twelve years since the Supreme Court ordered racial integration in the schools, and if anything, the nation is straying farther from this goal in its largest municipalities as the in-migration of Negroes from the rural South increases and the whites speed up their exodus to the suburbs. In New York City, the non-white public school population is now 50 per cent, as compared to 32 per cent only ten years ago. In Chicago, the non-white public school population has also grown to 50 per cent, and in the nation's capital it now hovers around 93 per cent. The educational problems of these schools are so enormous that one highly placed urban school official was quoted as stating that there is a whole generation of children who seem incapable of being taught enough to hold a job in their entire lifetime (Alexander, 1966).

Dropout figures among Negroes are much higher than among white students. In October, 1964, for example, fully one half of the non-white boys, age 16 to 21 were not in school, as compared with only one-third of the white boys in that age group--a difference largely attributable to disproportionate college enrollment rates (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965d). The Negro dropout rates at the elementary and high school levels are also relatively high. Although Negroes constitute less than 11 per cent of the total population in this country, their 18 to 26 year-olds have contributed more than 26 per cent of the dropouts in that age group and less than 10 per cent of the high school graduates (National Education Association, 1963a). However, there is some question as to whether dropping out of school, per se, is a major contributor to Negro unemployment. Studies show that even among high school graduates, non-whites find it harder to locate jobs than whites. In October, 1964, twice as many non-white high school graduates no longer

in school were looking for work than were their white counterparts (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965e). Even more startling is the fact that unemployment rates for non-white high school graduates in the 16-24 age group exceeded that of white dropouts and just about equaled that of non-white dropouts (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965c). It is apparent, therefore, that in a climate of racial prejudice a high school diploma is virtually powerless to combat unemployment among Negro youth. Without the privilege to use the credential as a self-help tool, the Negro also faces a bleak economic future. The low-skill jobs traditionally open to him are becoming scarcer, and the high-level occupations in industry and the professions which are opening for him as never before are finding that there are not enough Negroes with the perserverance to continue on to advanced schooling and qualify for these openings. This leaves the vast area of middle-status positions in the job world--mostly the white collar and semi-skilled service occupations--where the white job seeker has traditionally been a preferential choice even when his Negro competitor has had comparable educational qualifications.

Fortunately, recent reports show that the job picture is beginning to become somewhat brighter for the Negro. Since 1955 employment of Negroes and other non-whites increased from 6,400,000 to 7,700,000, a much faster rate of growth than among whites (U. S. Department of Labor, 1966a). This brought the ratio of non-white workers to total employment from 10.2 in 1955 to 10.7 in 1965. Another study of Negro employment trends conducted by the National Industrial Conference Board showed a recent increase of job opportunities in industry and attributed the breakthrough to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (New York Times, June 13, 1966). Progress toward racial equality may also explain a change in job opportunities for Negro high school graduates. Whereas Negro dropouts and graduates found it equally difficult to gain employment as recently as in 1964, a sharp discrepancy

had already developed by late 1965. The jobless rate for non-white dropouts remained unchanged at 16.5 per cent from October 1964 to October 1965, as against a decline from 13.6 per cent to 11.8 per cent for dropouts in general; however, the rate for non-white graduates did show a drop of six percentage points over that period (U. S. Department of Labor, 1966b). Once again it is apparent that in the job world a high school diploma is useless without racial equality, and vice versa.

Despite improvements in the educated non-white's chances for employment, there is still a relatively high concentration of Negroes in less skilled blue collar jobs and in service occupations. Only one out of five non-white employees held white collar jobs in the past ten years, as against one out of two whites. The extent to which Negro unemployment remains a serious problem is reflected in the finding that in 1965, non-whites constituted 11 per cent of the labor force, 21 per cent of those out of work 15 weeks or longer, and 27 per cent of those jobless more than 6 months. These proportions have remained fairly constant over the past eight years (U. S. Department of Labor, 1965f).

Some Correlates of Early School Withdrawal

There are many studies of the social and economic milieu in which the dropout problem flourishes. There are also large numbers of investigations into the behavioral characteristics of those who do not finish school. Surveys of community conditions associated with dropout rates provide a fairly clear picture of the critical factors involved. Young (1963) found an inverse relationship between early school withdrawal and such indices as average income in the community, rental rates, teachers' salaries, the amount of schoO schooling completed by adults, the proportion of professionals residing in the area, and the per capita student expenditure. Positively related were the incidence of overcrowdedness in dwelling units and pupil and teacher turnover in the local schools.

A more recent study by Dentler and Warshauer (1965) dealt with demographic correlates in 131 large cities across the nation. They found a cluster of social and economic variables correlating .87 with dropout rates among white students and accounting for 76 per cent of the variance for this sub-population. More than half of the variance could be explained by such factors as per cent of population in white collar occupation, per cent of white families with annual incomes under $1000, and the white adult illiteracy rate. From the data presented, it is evident that in communities where income is low, population growth stable, and where the very young constitute a large proportion of the population, there would be a high incidence of early school withdrawal among white residents.

Also indentified were several social and economic variables that correlated .67 with non-white dropout rates and accounted for some 45 per cent of the variance. By far the most important factor was the white dropout rate, followed by the per cent of non-white male operatives, the non-white illiteracy rate, and the per cent of non-white, non-Negroes residing in the communities. Interestingly enough, economic impoverishment was <u>not</u> associated with high dropout rates among the non-white groups.

Dentler and Warshauer did separate analyses of cities where dropout rates were higher or lower than expectation according to their prediction formula. They found that in those communities where there was a low incidence of illiteracy, low population density, few male operatives, little public expenditure on health and hospitals, and high payments for Aid to Families with Dependent Children there tended to be lower-than-expected dropout rates among the white population. For non-white population, the critical variables were per pupil expenditure and average payment per family of AFDC.

Studies of community conditions as they relate to dropout rates show that the problem is severest among the poverty stricken and socially disadvantaged, especially the non-whites in these groups. These are the slum

dwellers, many of whom gravitate to the big city in search of employment primarily in the unskilled labor force. As their influx increases, the middle class families flee to the suburbs leaving behind large ghettoes ridden with poverty, social pathology, and educational failure. Thus, Schreiber (1964a) found that the holding power of the 1963 graduating high school class in 128 large cities was more than 5 per cent less than the national average, based on grade 10 enrollment. The loss in New York City from tenth grade in 1960-61 to high school graduation in 1962-63 was as great as the dropout rate from the fifth grade in 1952-53 to high school graduation in 1960 for the nation as a whole (National Education Association, 1963b). In Philadelphia, nearly half of the 1960 tenth graders failed to complete twelve grades by 1963.

The crisis environment in the lower class home makes it difficult for the child to see much need or possibility of finishing school. He lives in a dingy, overcrowded home where there is no privacy for schoolwork, no calm and quiet in which to concentrate on ideas, no success model to emulate. The family is large and the siblings can often distract a student from serious work. Sometimes, he is denied a good night's sleep because his sleeping quarters are uncomfortable and someone in the family is invariably demanding attention during the night. When he awakens in the morning, his breakfast is rationed according to food supply, and he is sent off to school hungry and unprepared to compete against national achievement norms. Too often there is no father in the home to help make ends meet, and all able bodied members of the family must lend a hand as soon as they reach employment age. The family must live for the present because subsistence is at stake. It cannot afford the luxury of allowing its members to defer entrance into the job world by prolonging schooling even if the time investment in education means a better job in the future. Today's need cannot be satisfied with the promise of tomorrow.

Poverty and poor living conditions are not the only deterrents to success at school among the socially disadvantaged. Children coming from these homes grow up in an environment that is virtually barren of educational interests. Although parents pay lip-service to education, they rarely have the desire or reserve wherewithal to make sacrifices for it. Schreiber (1964b) found that approximately two-thirds of the parents of dropouts are either hostile or indifferent toward school, and more than 70 per cent of them had failed to complete twelve grades. Thus, children who withdraw from school are often merely following in the footsteps of their parents. They learn to hate school almost from the day they enroll. The classroom teacher punishes them for behaviors that seem acceptable at home and holds them to academic standards that their home environment has never prepared them to meet. They take a cynical view of the teacher who constantly preaches that hard work inevitably leads to success because they see how futile has been the hard work of their own parents. Small wonder that more than 85 per cent of the nation's dropouts come from the lower classes (Bowman and Matthews, 1960).

Studies of personal characteristics of dropouts also provide clues as to why they withdraw from school. Voss, Wendling, and Elliott (1966) reviewed a sampling of studies of students who leave school early and found that they could be divided into three categories: (1) The involuntary dropout who withdraws because of personal illness or accident; (2) the retarded dropout who is unable to handle the required work at school; and (3) the capable dropout, who could finish school if he were motivated to do so, but who is discouraged by peer and parental attitudes toward education.

Dropout inventories do not take a close account of those who leave

school involuntarily, but much is known about the retarded and capable students who fail to earn a high school diploma. As might be expected, studies of scholastic aptitudes among school dropouts generally show lower-than-average scores on intelligence tests, and the discrepancies are greater between high school graduates and those who never enter high school than between the graduates and those who enter and drop out. A survey conducted by the U. S. Department of Labor (1960) showed that some 31 per cent of students never reaching or completing high school had I.Q.'s of 85 and under, as against only 10 per cent of the high school graduates, and that a mere 6 per cent of those failing to finish school had I.Q.'s of 110 and above, as compared to 16 per cent of the diploma recipients. On the other hand, a study by McCreary and Kitch (1953), dealing only with sophomore withdrawals from high school matched with attending classmates on the basis of school attended, sex, socio-economic status, and rate of promotion showed no difference in I.Q. Research in New York City schools (Board of Education of the City of New York, 1956) also showed far more overlap than discrepancy in I.Q. scores when high school dropouts were compared with graduates. However, the picture is much different for those who leave school in the pre-high school grades. Dillon (1949) found that about 36 per cent of his sample of more than 1,000 dropouts in grades 7 through 12 had I.Q. scores below 85 while some 75 per cent of the dropouts who had left school in the seventh grade scored below this level.

Deficiency in verbal skills and in school achievement are more closely related to early school withdrawal than is I.Q. A Labor Department survey found that whereas 75 per cent of the school dropouts tested below average in intelligence, 84 per cent of the dropouts were in classes at least one

year below the grade levels they should have reached at the time of withdrawal. As many as 30 per cent never reached as high as the tenth grade (U. S. Department of Labor, 1960). A more recent study in Rochester showed that while the median I.Q. for male dropouts was at the 41st percentile, their reading scores were only at the 31st percentile (New York State Division for Youth, 1962). These data suggest that a serious problem of scholastic underachievement can be an important factor in precipitating early school withdrawal. Many of the so-called "underachievers" who are likely to drop out show signs of failure as early as the fourth grade, and the rest of their school experience is merely a matter of marking time before they are legally able to withdraw (Lichter, 1962). Their school attendance becomes irregular, they refuse to participate in extracurricular activities, they frequently change schools, and their records show a long list of disciplinary problems (Cervantes, 1965).

There are also many adolescents with sufficient ability to succeed at school but who are inhibited by any number of intrapsychic and interpersonal problems. One study estimated that fully 80 per cent of those discharged from the armed services for personality disorders do not complete ten grades of schooling (Rohrer, 1964). These young people do not seek psychotherapeutic help, nor does much behavior change result when they do obtain help. They are particularly resentful of all kinds of authority at home, at school, on the job, in church, and with the police. Their self-image is weak, and they find it difficult to defer the gratification of immediate needs and desires. They come from homes where the parents have difficulty in controlling their offspring, where the relationship among members of the family is not warm and supportive, where the father figure

is either weak or absent, and where there is little evidence of a clear and consistent code of behavior (Cervantes, 1965; Rohrer, 1964).

The many emotional disorders and intellectual deficits that inhibit school completion attack children of all ethnic groups at all class levels. They are particularly devastating among the lower socio-economic sub-populations. Where the general life circumstances are depressing, young people do not have the necessary resilience to resist personal problems and maintain a steady course toward long-range goals. The middle-class child--even the one with serious personal problems--somehow finds enough supportiveness in his milieu to encourage him to stay in school. His lower-class counterpart receives no such help. Yet, the tragic irony is that the lower-class child is the one who can least afford to enter adulthood without sufficient education.

Dropouts are frequently viewed by educators as students who elect to shorten their education because of pressures originating outside of school. The dropouts view themselves quite differently. The reasons they give most often for leaving school have to do with discouragements and dissatisfactions relating to the school program. One study reports that 38 per cent of the male dropouts and 32 per cent of the females listed "Adverse School Experience" as their reason for withdrawing (Sofokodis and Sullivan, 1964). This response was given more often than any other, which suggests that dropouts frequently see themselves as having been pushed out of school rather than having left under their own power. Many report that they received no encouragement or inspiration from their teachers, nor did they enjoy good relationships with their fellow students. Staying in school would have meant continuing on a treadmill without much hope for accom-

plishment. The only solution for them was to cut loose, get out into the world, and earn some money.

How the Dropout Problem Is Attacked

Many programs have been developed in the recent past to make young people education conscious or employable or both. Schools have assumed the bulk of the responsibility, but they are being assisted in growing measure through special projects sponsored by community organizations, and by industry as part of the nation's war against poverty. Strategies range all the way from preventive programs beginning at the pre-school level to "Return to School" campaigns and job training for those who have withdrawn. One of the widest-scale, most publicized effort took place in the summer of 1963 at the request of the late President Kennedy, who allocated a quarter of a million dollars to 23 states and the District of Columbia to persuade would-be dropouts to return to school in September. Other agencies and organizations at the national, state, and local levels joined in the campaign in order to mobilize efforts in as many municipalities as possible. So many participating sponsors contributed efforts to the crash program that it is impossible to determine exactly how many children were contacted. However, the 63 communities receiving allocations from the President's Emergency Fund reported: (1) 1,375 counselors and other professional workers whose salaries were paid from the special fund participated in the campaign; (2) 59,300 young people identified by these workers as dropouts and prospective dropouts were contacted during the campaign; (3) somewhat more than half of the target group returned to school in September; and (4) more than 90 per cent of the youths returning to school in September were still

enrolled at the end of October. Needless to say, the program had enormous public relations value. However, there is no information available as to how many would have come back to school anyway, how many were compelled to return by law because they were underage, and how many stayed on to graduate.

Aside from the nationwide crash programs aimed at discouraging would-be dropouts from going through with their plans, there have been many on-going guidance projects at the local school levels designed also to exercise preventive measures. Counselors generally agree that their work has little value after the pupil has made up his mind to leave school. Potential dropouts can be spotted as early as the elementary grades provided the school has a well-designed testing program, and given a clear picture of the pupil's personal development and an opportunity to reach him long before he is legally able to withdraw, the guidance counselor can succeed in persuading him to stay in school. Moore (1963) reports some evidence to show the success of intensive guidance programs in reducing dropout rates. These programs were effective where potential dropouts were identified early, where total faculties contributed their efforts in coordinated fashion, where schedules allowed for additional counseling time, where the dropout-prone could receive work readiness, and where close contact with parents could be achieved. In most schools, however, especially those in depressed areas where the dropout problem is severest, such coordinated, intensive efforts are difficult to achieve. It is perhaps for this reason that counseling programs have not been dramatically successful in depressed areas.

One special program in New York City (Board of Education of the City of New York, 1956) illustrates how difficult it is to make a dent on dropout rates in slum schools. In this project, the school officials considered

themselves fortunate to be assigned one counselor per 125 students. But even though these services were considered lavish by city-wide standards, there were simply not enough counselors to establish frequent, prolonged contact with the pupils showing signs of early withdrawal from school. Nor was there enough time to reach the parents and solicit their close support. Instead, the counselors were involved mostly in collecting test data, making programmatic adaptations to fit the ability and interest levels of the dropout-prone, finding part-time work for them, and exchanging correspondence with local social agencies. As might be expected, little of substance was accomplished.

The need for large-scale, well-coordinated counseling services in order to achieve success in slum schools was dramatically illustrated by the constrasting results obtained in the P.S. 43 demonstration program in New York City and in its derivative Higher Horizons Program. The essential difference in services between the two programs was quantitative rather than qualitative. At P.S. 43, the counseling and remedial education staffs were sharply augmented to provide a high concentration of supplementary help to pupils in a single depressed area school. Added services were also available to these pupils when they continued on to the local high school. The staff had no magical formula for obtaining results; they effected better school performance and better retention rates purely by hard compensatory work over a long period of time. The eventual payoff was highly dramatic. Of the 105 children tested at the beginning of the project and three years later, 78 of them showed an increase in I.Q., 40 of them gained more than 10 points, and 13 gained more than 20 points. The dropout rate from high school for these children prior to the project

was around 40 per cent; the rate for the project children was less than 20 per cent.

The Higher Horizons Program, on the other hand, provided relatively token special services to large numbers of schools in the hope that the success of P.S. 43 could be replicated on a large scale at minimum extra cost. The result was failure, perhaps because the amount of services was no match for the magnitude of the problem.

Some dropout prevention programs are designed to keep the dropout-prone in school by modifying its requirements to fit the ambitions and tastes of every student. In effect, they say to the student, "Stay in school, and we will provide you with something to hold your interest." It may be a watered-down version of the conventional curriculum, or limited vocational training as a substitute for academic instruction, or a combination of study at school and salaried employment in the field. These programmatic modifications are often attempts at making class attendance attractive to the student, even if it means sacrificing educational standards traditionally associated with secondary schooling. Unless these programs have long-range value, they simply fill a void and constitute little more than a bribe to stay in school. On paper, they may be instrumental in improving school retention rates, but their net effect on the students' growth and development needs to be tested.

Most of the procedures for retaining potential dropouts in school are designed for the junior and senior high schools. Efforts are made to change the role of the teacher from an enforcer of pre-set classroom demands to one who pitches his program at the pupil's level of functioning. The course of study is designed to be of immediate practicality to the

student and introduces simple vocational readiness experiences as a way of bringing him into contact with the demands of the job world. In inner-city schools, where large numbers of students lack the motivation to finish school, these special programs are designed on a school-within-a-school basis drawing off the marginal students from regular programs in order to relieve them of the competition from more highly motivated schoolmates.

Curriculum designs for socially disadvantaged pupils who need special encouragement to continue their schooling vary greatly in schools across the country. However, they usually follow the kinds of curriculum guidelines set forth by Savitsky (1965), as follows:

Personalize. Bring the student into focus by making the learning content relevant to his own experiences and aspirations. What is of practical interest to the child from a disadvantaged background may be quite different from what appeals to children from favored environments.

Orient to job experience or world of work. The disadvantaged pupil is job conscious and seeking a short-range goal that holds some promise of economic stability. Anything that helps prepare him for the world of work is meaningful to him. This basic interest may be used as a medium for improving instruction in basic skills as well as preparing him to be a successful job-seeker.

Use the present and current events as a basis for understandings. All pupils need to benefit from general education, not just the skills that are of practical, immediate value. Teachers can capitalize on the disadvantaged pupils' concern with the here-and-now world by introducing present-day problems as a springboard toward formulating more generalized concepts.

Adapt or arrange text materials to fit reading levels, interests, and needs. Most of the existing textbooks do not take into consideration the

special backgrounds, vocabulary, and interests of disadvantaged children. These pupils need content that is more relevant to their everyday lives and with which they can readily identify. It may be simpler to elicit responsiveness by developing textbook content at their interest levels without overburdening them with complex language structure.

Correlate with more than one subject area. Fragmentation of instruction at the junior high school level and beyond may, in effect, depersonalize learning for the socially disadvantaged, and thereby discourage them from making progress. If teachers could operate as teams, pooling information, interrelating content, and planning cooperatively, the students may come to realize that their interests are not being neglected.

Oral communication. Verbal interaction is one of the key elements of socialized behavior. Teachers often discourage the development of oral communication skills among disadvantaged children when they sense the difficulties these pupils have in utilizing them. The teacher gives up prematurely, and the child is afflicted with a permanent handicap.

Work for standards. Disadvantaged pupils are capable of learning and should be required and encouraged to accept standards of accomplishment. This is necessary to build the child's self-esteem in the school world. However, these responsibilities should be the kind that are attainable by the student; otherwise, failure will become compounded and he will be discouraged from coming to grips even with those learning tasks that he is capable of negotiating.

Organize short, achievable units. These shorter units facilitate mastery by gradation and posit achievable for pupils whose attention spans are short and whose work habits are poorly organized.

Build in elements of success. Positive reinforcement of correct learning responses can be a powerful encouragement for continued concentration and learning success. The disadvantaged rarely experience success in and out of school and are therefore often unable to assess their true capabilities. Providing them with meaningful success experiences can help counteract the debilitating effects of repeated frustration.

Provide for exploration and discovery, including learning how to think. Help these students develop their own strategies for problem solving which they can utilize independently and with skill. Once the child has developed a method of attack, with the help of a talented teacher, he will reach out into worlds of ambiguity and know how to achieve clarity by himself.

Aside from modifying conventional curriculum, beginning at the junior high school level, dropout prevention programs also stress job preparation and experience. Guidance counselors play a major role in helping would-be dropouts see the advantages of preparing adequately for employment. Academic work is supplemented by some vocational training, often in special schools designated for that purpose. These institutions have the facilities for developing skills in woodwork, metal work, automotive trades, ship building, food service, tailoring, upholstery, and other semi-skilled occupations.

Unfortunately, the work of vocational high schools has not met with universal approval among educators. Some point to the fact that the drop-out rate in these schools is 60 per cent higher than in academic high schools and therefore serve more as dumping grounds for unwanted students than learning centers catering to special needs. Minority groups are often over-represented in many of these schools, thus making the school system

vulnerable to criticism as practicing de facto segregation. The program is characterized as rigid and obsolete, and students who complete it are said to be no better prepared for work than students who have no such training (Kohler, 1962; Public Education Association Committee on Education, Guidance, and Work, 1963). As an alternative to maintaining vocational schools, some big cities will soon offer exploratory work courses to all students in all high schools. In these programs, there will be less sacrifice of academic studies in order to accommodate vocational training, and the hoped-for goal is better mastery of basic skills with no loss of vocational preparation.

Work-study programs have also been adopted by school systems throughout the country to discourage some children from dropping out by enabling them to continue their studies and to earn money at a part-time job. Junior high school students are carefully groomed to meet the success demands of the job world and are then placed in part-time work under close supervision, supported by intensive training at school. Some schools offer paid work experience only in the school building while others arrange for employment off campus. All programs preserve some emphasis on academic study and offer considerable guidance services during the time the student spends at school.

Most of the dropout prevention programs that focus mainly on the junior and senior high school levels are little better than stop-gap measures. They concede the student's scholastic failure, and try to help him live with that handicap as best he can. The more comprehensive programs, however, aim at forestalling educational retardation and provide for a large-scale coordinated attack on the problem from the home, the school, and the community. Project Head Start, with its emphasis on early

intervention, remains yet to be fully evaluated; but if it enhances the school preparedness of pupils from socially disadvantaged environments it may also reduce dropout rates, provided improved readiness is translated into sustained school success. There is still a great need to determine the special readiness curricula, teaching techniques, and optimum age of intervention. One carefully controlled study (Tannenbaum and Hodell, 1966) showed that well-planned readiness experiences administered to slum neighborhood first graders singled out as potential reading retardates had no measurable affect on their achievement after one full year of instruction. It should therefore not be assumed that early intervention will guarantee improved school performance for the lower-class child.

Cervantes (1965) advocates a large-scale, coordinated attack on the dropout problem bringing to bear the following forces:

(1) Community. Organize a citizens' group representing the schools, employment services, labor and management, social service agencies, "character building" agencies, churches, civic and fraternal groups, service clubs, foundations, and communication and government agencies. This committee can alert the community to the special problems of early school withdrawal and sensitize itself to ways of dealing with the problem. It can stimulate industry to hire more untrained young workers and call upon labor unions to liberalize its membership requirements. It can encourage summer anti-dropout campaigns similar to the crash program organized in 1963. It can also promote pre-school programs and urge large numbers of slum-neighborhood parents to enroll their children in them.

(2) Government. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 is a prototype of the kind of help the Federal government can provide. Many thousands of

young men with limited skills have entered into special government projects and are receiving the kind of help that would otherwise not be easily available to them. Federal intervention has also stirred many state and local communities to mount their own programs.

(3) Business. On a much too limited scale, American businessmen are beginning to realize that rehabilitating the school dropout represents a good business investment. Some large companies are therefore hiring teenagers without high school diplomas and providing special assistance for them to succeed on the job. Such projects have exercised some holding power on these young people thus far, and there are enough positive results to encourage large corporations to broaden the practice. In some instances, too, representatives of big business have visited local high schools regularly to persuade students to stay in school rather than allow themselves to be cast adrift in the job world without any marketable skills.

(4) Labor. Some of the arbitrary membership restrictions in labor unions ought to be eased in order to accomodate young people from poor backgrounds and with limited schooling. Since minority groups are over-represented in the dropout population, racial discrimination in some trade unions constitute a serious barrier to economic independence. Not only should these practices be abolished, but labor ought to develop training programs and promote apprenticeships for those who need extra help.

(5) Schools. Any number of curriculum modifications designed to fit the backgrounds, interests, and performance levels of potential dropouts should be introduced in schools where the problem is severe. In addition, the teacher must be especially skillful and dedicated to do one of the most difficult jobs in the profession. Finally, intensive counseling services

can help convince the poorly motivated that the school is really interested in their progress and is prepared to help them make the most of their innate abilities. School systems throughout the country are responding to public pressures to improve education for the socially disadvantaged. As a result, a large number of programs have been written, fewer have been implemented, and fewer still have been evaluated.

(6) Volunteer Groups. Communities generally have enormous amounts of talent that could be marshalled to assist schools in upgrading the education of marginal students. High school graduates, college-trained parents, widows with adequate education, and other knowledgeable laymen have the time and can develop the skill to provide a variety of educational services. In some cities, they offer tutorial help to children who need it, and in others they assist teachers on trips and with clerical chores. The enormous possibilities of out-of-school volunteer and paid services have hardly been explored by educational institutions.

(7) The Family. Systematic efforts are needed to reduce the social distance between the potential dropout's home and the school. Most teachers working in slum areas are barely familiar with the dynamics of community life surrounding the school building and the degree of importance attached to the school by its inhabitants. They can learn much by visiting the homes of their pupils and learning about parental attitudes toward school and the neighborhood conditions that inhibit and encourage school success.

Once the student drops out of school, it is difficult to maintain contact with him in order to supply supportive services. In the past, dropouts have been written off as failures mainly because they no longer have any institutional affiliation. However, with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 the Federal government has acknowledged that school withdrawal is

too serious a problem to be handled solely by the schools. The Act established the Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps under Federal support and administration. The Job Corps is a residential training program similar to the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's. In 1965, its first year of operation, it enrolled 40,000 youths in urban and rural centers and provided them with job training as well as remediation in basic skills. The Neighborhood Youth Corps provided short-term employment and some ancillary services for 100,000 in-and-out-of-school youth in 1965. In addition, the Federal government has expanded existing agencies, especially the state employment services, which for the first time are beginning to reach out to slum youths who were formerly regarded as unemployable.

Most of the new programs for dropouts are designed to provide educational and vocational adjustment; some even attempt to stimulate upward economic mobility. It is as yet much too early to determine the success of these vigorous attempts to help undereducated and underemployed young people achieve a productive life for themselves. Research and evaluation lag far behind programming. However, these out-of-school programs make it clear that the school dropout is not simply a problem for educators. The current many-sided attack on the so-called "dropout" problem may indeed be a first step toward placing the school in proper social perspective and discrediting the popular myth that the schools <u>alone</u> have the capability to prepare the entire present-day youth population for the world of tomorrow.

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